A dale, particularly in Scotland and northern England, is the word for an open valley. There’s not too many dales in New Orleans, to be sure, but it so happened that there was an open area ideal for a new casual restaurant in the Navarre area of Lakeview, near Mid-City and City Park.

Located at 801 Rosedale Drive, just off Canal Boulevard and close to City Park Avenue, is Susan’s Spicer’s newly opened “Rosedale”, housed inside the former 3rd District police station, which was first erected along the New Basin Canal in 1937 and later moved to its present location in 1951.
The building, rediscovered by Kevin Centanni, is one that Susan Spicer just “fell in love with” and it’s easy to see why. There are still windows with bars on one side of the structure, and a former jail cell within has been converted to a bathroom marked “U”. The eatery’s central hallway rises up into the attic displaying its well-lit exposed beams. There is relaxed dining in both the front and rear of the restaurant, with a wall of windows in the back looking out over the railroad track and what could eventually be home to an expanded Lafitte Greenway, should the master plan for the public park be fully actualized. There is also an interesting special history wall with old photographs and historic documents connected with the building and neighborhood.

On a recent visit to Rosedale, this author enjoyed a wonderful array of small dishes, such as Oysters Rockefeller, turtle soup, alligator boudin balls, fried frog legs and pulled pork po-boys, just to name a few.

Rosedale originally a police station on the New Basin Canal

For many New Orleanians the name Rosedale may be unfamiliar, but it has been synonymous with dining in New Orleans for almost a century.

In 1926, the “Rosedale Inn” opened its doors for the first time. The *Times-Picayune* heralded its arrival on June 5, 1926, as a “new ‘drive-in’ soda and sandwich service confectionery.” In addition, motorists wishing to “be served in their machines will find little congestion or inconvenience.” Located at Canal Boulevard and Rosedale Drive,” it was operated by Odenwald and Gros, who ran a combination cigar store and soda fountain at the corner of Canal Street and Exchange Place. The original establishment (founded 1907) was noted for its custard ice cream, which was flavored with only the best vanilla beans
from Madagascar. The dark specks made it aesthetically delectable, served by all the best restaurants in those days: Antoine’s, Arnaud’s and Galatoire’s.

The Rosedale Inn as it appeared in June, 1926

Joseph Odenwald died in 1928 after an illness of two years. His Rosedale Inn was sold earlier that year to John L. Lenfant, a multi-talented local character. At various times in his life, Lenfant had been a barber, a drugstore proprietor, a soft drink bottler, operated a grocery store and bar at Elysian Fields and North Villere, a chain of seafood restaurants, a night club, an open-air dance garden on St. Claude Avenue, and the Elysian Fields Theater, for which he booked vaudeville acts. He even volunteered to be a sparring partner for Jake Kilrain, the boxer, who was preparing for his championship bout with another John L. – John L. Sullivan. In 1930, John L. Lenfant hired the up-and-coming Louie Prima and his brother Leon to play at his “Beverly Gardens” Club on Metairie Road.

Most New Orleanians may be familiar with Lenfant’s, the white stucco restaurant with glass bricks built in that unique architectural style known as “Streamline Moderne”. And back in the 50s, many a just-licensed teen would drive into Lenfant’s expansive parking lot hungering for curb service, as well as a little romantic osculation. But who today recalls that Lenfant’s got its start as Lenfant’s Rosedale Inn?

Among John L. Lenfant’s various enterprises were the seafood restaurants – Lenfant’s Rosedale Inn, first opened in 1928 on Canal
Boulevard; the Rosedale Inn on Canal Street (yes, there were more than one); Lenfant’s Seafood Restaurant at 5236 Canal Boulevard (opened 1936); Lenfant’s Rosedale on South Claiborne Avenue at Jackson Avenue, and, in 1941, what many remember as the white stucco and glass-bricked Lenfant’s proudly featuring its “lobster dressed as a waiter” logo. Just next door on its downtown side was Lenfant’s Boulevard Room for private catered events.

LENFANT’S ROSEDALE INNS
(1915 Canal St. and 5205 Canal Blvd.)
A top spot for a bite—or a drink—on the run—but you won’t feel like continuing on your way once you’re inside—’cause the sandwiches—and the sodas—and the mixed drinks—are so much that way—and Lenfant’s is open all night long—though it seems short.

ALL LENFANT’S ROSEDALE INNS
ARE Specializing in
MINT JULEPS
Made With Kentucky’s Famous
OLD FORESTER WHISKEY

Lenfant’s Rosedale Inns and their various locations

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, Lenfant’s reputation was earned, as Gastronomy columnist Jack Duarte wrote in the Times-Picayune, “with an ambitious blending of good restaurant food, excellent banquet facilities and large scale catering operations.” Along the way, Lenfant’s catering operations got in the way of its restaurant business, and in the 1970s the Fein family of restaurateurs (of Court of Two Sisters fame) bought Lenfant’s from the four Lenfant brothers, John L. Lenfant’s sons: Henry J., Harold P., John L. Jr. and Louis. There were great dishes to be had: “red fish amandine, broiled tropical lobster, fried jumbo soft shell crabs” and a “Shirley Temple” or “Roy Rogers” cocktail for the kids. There was even a “Rosedale” three-decker sandwich made with baked ham, Swiss cheese and 1,000 Island Dressing.
With the 1982 economic downturn, the Fein family decided to close the restaurant. After sitting empty for a time, Joe Marcello acquired Lenfant’s, made things more elegant and brought over Chef Tom Cowman, formerly of Restaurant Jonathan on Rampart. But the city became involved in drainage and paving work in and around the immediate area of the restaurant. Then a workman dug up human bones. That was the end. The iconic restaurant was shut down and demolished to make room for a funeral home.

The Rosedale Inn and Lenfant’s operations on Canal Boulevard were not the only places to dine at Rosedale and Canal Boulevard. In the 1930s, there was also Phil La Valle’s Starlight Inn at 5225 Canal Boulevard where, according to a 1939 Times-Picayune article, “none but the very best quality foods and liquors” were served and “the latest song hits and orchestrations are played over one of the finest music amplifiers in New Orleans.” La Valle got the idea for his business while hopping cars at night at age 13. Popular fare there was the “chicken club, shoft-shell and stuffed crab and special steak sandwiches in addition to the famous Starlight Inn hamburgers and delicious Mexican chili.”

But one evening in 1935, one young lady lost her wig at the Starlight. Her beautiful tresses were handed over to another lady for safe keeping, but they managed to escape the hatbox. An ad in the newspaper relocated the missing locks and the keeper of the curls. In
1942, the Starlight had a new name, the Star Bright Inn, and a new manager, Sam Saia, Jr.

*John Lucien Lenfant Sr., the father in the center, with (l to r) sons Henry J., Harold P., John L. Jr. and Louis in their straw katys*

Today, Rosedale offers casual dining like the drive-ins of old – but with Susan Spicer’s inspired creative mastery. Simple comfort food is given a new spin with her culinary skills and her special attention to detail. Enjoy some excellent food there and soak in a little neighborhood history to boot. Just paces away was the Colored Waif’s Home where Louis Armstrong was sent after firing a pistol in the street to celebrate New Year’s Eve in 1912. Louis (shown below) received musical instruction from the Waif’s Home band director, Peter Davis.
Louis Armstrong is in the middle at the very top (red arrow)

Also just a short distance away is the Holt Cemetery, where Jazz legend Buddy Bolden is buried, and off toward City Park Avenue is the former location of Higgins Industries, where Andrew Jackson Higgins’ designed and produced his amphibious landing craft capable of delivering large numbers of men and equipment safely and efficiently from ship to shore. Higgins boats were on hand in every major American amphibious operation in the European and Pacific theaters, most notably the D-Day landing in Normandy. The Congressional record reflects that in 1964 President Dwight D. Eisenhower told his biographer, Stephen Ambrose, that Higgins “is the man who won the war for us.”
Susan greets guests at recent Rosedale opening

1963 ad featuring the familiar Lenfant’s Lobster waiter
To create Rosedale’s menu, Spicer teamed up with Brett “Shaggy” Duffee, who was the chef de cuisine at Spicer’s celebrated French Quarter restaurant Bayona. The menu offers local cuisine with a twist, incorporating those international flavors for which Spicer is renowned. Mondo is her other restaurant, also in Lakeview, where Spicer calls home.

Rosedale has a great bar, protected by votive candles with the images of Ernie K-Doe, Pete Fountain, Lee Dorsey and other New Orleans greats. Although Rosedale won’t have an actual brunch menu, dishes
will be added to appeal to late-risers, such as a stone ground grits bowl with shrimp or added vegetables.

Rosedale, at the center of all this history, will soon be making its own culinary mark tomorrow and in years to come.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
“Rosedale”
Ned Hémard
Copyright 2016